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BANGKOK FOR REFCOORD

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SUBJECT: GVN ON CENTRAL HIGHLANDS UNREST

REF: HCMC 0406

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security (MPS) officials briefed the DCM about the recent unrest in the Central Highlands and asked for USG assistance in cutting off support for the demonstrations from U.S.-based organizations, in particular the Montagnard Foundation, Inc. In the April 19 meeting, MPS also asked for USG support in discouraging people from fleeing to Cambodia to seek UNHCR protection and eventual resettlement in the U.S. DCM responded that while the U.S. does not support the use of violence we do support the right of free expression. He noted that we have announced an end to the policy of resettlement screening Montagnards who have been rejected by UNHCR. Such persons are now told they may directly contact the U.S. Consulate in HCMC instead. The DCM praised GVN transparency in allowing foreign delegations to visit the Central Highlands and encouraged continued openness for people to see for themselves the situation on the ground. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a two-hour meeting requested by MPS, Deputy Director General of the MPS General Security Department To Lam said that he had been directed by Vice Minister of Public Security Nguyen Van Huong to inform the embassy of recent protests in the Central Highlands (CH)(Reftel). Lam said the demonstrators wanted to establish an independent Degar state and some of the demands involved land rights. Lam did not see any connection to any religious issues.

¶3. (SBU) Lam said MPS has discovered that FULRO (The United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races) and the South Carolina-based Montagnard Foundation, Inc. (MFI) are inciting people in the CH to launch anti-GVN demonstrations in Gia Lai, Dak Lak and Phu Yen provinces with the goal of destabilizing the region and gaining international publicity. Local officials explained the situation to the people, and corrected the false information they had received from FULRO and the Montagnard Foundation. Montagnard Foundation President Kok Ksor, Lam claimed, wanted to drum up large demonstrations as in 2001 and 2004, but this time the demonstrations were small. The latest demonstration involved a dozen people at a village headquarters on April 14, but the situation is now calm. About 30-40 people were detained for two to three days, then released, Lam claimed. One or two who had been engaged in violence, however, remain incarcerated.

¶4. (SBU) Lam said there had been stone throwing and attacks by demonstrators using sticks on local officials. The authorities responded with restraint, Lam said, but MFI's Kok Ksor used slogans to incite violence. DCM responded that encouraging people to demonstrate is not a crime in the United States but violence is. Lam said the demonstrators were receiving direction from Kok Ksor and that MPS would provide evidence that FULRO is also encouraging violence.

15. (SBU) According to MPS, they have information that people will be coming from the U.S. at the end of April or early May to encourage further anti-government demonstrations. MPS provided a list with the following names and information regarding individuals they said are active in organizing the demonstrations:

1. Y Luong Nie, Greensboro, NC
2. Bo Choc, Greensboro, NC
3. Bo Nghit, Greensboro, NC
4. Y Ykhyk, 1210 Westside Dr., Greensboro, NC
5. Y hmlok Nai, 1408 Mayfair Ave., Greensboro, NC
6. Day Dieu, 3304 N Elm St., Greensboro, NC
7. Y M Krong, 208 W Smith St., Greensboro, NC
8. Sang (Bo Than), 2806 James St., Charlotte, NC
9. Donald Holbrook, 308 Glencourt Dr., Charlotte, NC

16. (SBU) Kok Ksor provides financing and equipment for anti-government demonstrations in Vietnam and the GVN requests USG assistance in stopping them from doing so, Lam said. The Montagnard Foundation is a "paramilitary" organization with the intent of launching terrorist attacks in Vietnam, Lam alleged. The USG should also list it as a terrorist organization so we can cooperate in preventing anti-GVN demonstrations. We have a good bilateral relationship, Lam said, and we do not want bad people to make it worse. The GVN would like a formal announcement that the USG does not support the demonstrations.

17. (SBU) The other area where the GVN and USG should cooperate is in discouraging people from fleeing Vietnam to Cambodia, Lam said. Many have the idea that if they protest in Vietnam, they can flee across the border, and UNHCR will help them resettle in the United States. The GVN would like a statement from the USG that it will not resettle people who flee to Cambodia. The DCM responded that we have announced an end to the policy of considering Montagnards for resettlement even if UNHCR had refused them refugee status. Instead, such persons are informed that they may contact the U.S.

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Consulate General in HCMC if they believe they have a claim for resettlement.

18. (SBU) Lam noted that many provincial officials even now do not want foreign delegations to visit the CH, even though the GVN understands that foreign delegations visit the CH for humanitarian reasons. The DCM responded that the GVN has done the right thing by allowing and encouraging more people to visit the CH, since this encourages transparency and counters inaccurate reports from outside Vietnam.

19. (SBU) The DCM cited the recent VolVis delegation of CH leaders who visited North Carolina while in the U.S. as another good step in building greater trust as our bilateral relations continue to improve. The DCM noted that the U.S. supports the right of individuals to organize and express their opinions peacefully and, absent compelling and verifiable evidence from the GVN, is not likely to list FULRO as a terrorist organization.

110. (SBU) Note: The GVN has asserted several times in recent years that FULRO and MFI are active terrorist organizations and that the USG should designate them as such, but has yet to provide evidence that would support the designation. FULRO officially disbanded in late 1992, when its last few hundred guerillas surrendered to UN peacekeepers in Cambodia. FULRO's leadership was instrumental in organizing MFI, but MFI's web site and frequent press releases stress that it is committed to non-violence. End note.

11. (U) This cable was coordinated with ConGen HCMC.

MICHALAK